George's PINK PAGES May 2000
Nectar Flow "Must Do" Items

The NECTAR FLOW IS ON! You should have put about 5 supers of drawn comb on your colonies before the first of May, but if you did not, and if your bees HAVE NOT ALREADY SWARMED, you should do it tomorrow rain or shine, or give up beeHAVING because you certainly don't assist your bees when they need assistance. With no super space or INADEQUATE super space, those bees are going to swarm and find a new home. If you think your bees can produce 2-3 supers of honey in May, that means that you must have 4-5 supers of drawn comb in place to store all that thin watery nectar until the bees can evaporate the water and convert the nectar into honey.

Some members do not have drawn comb (the most valuable possession of a beekeeper), and have to use foundation, which is a whole "new story", because you can NOT use foundation as if it were drawn comb. TEN frames of foundation (never nine) must be in a super to get the foundation properly drawn, and only ONE super of foundation on a colony at one time. When the bees have drawn 6-7 frames and partially filled them with nectar, move the untouched foundation to the center of the super and the partially filled frames to the outside, and THEN add a second super of 10 frames of foundation, and repeat the process for the 3rd super, etc..

There is a true old saying: A good beekeeper has Too Many Supers in place when a nectar flow begins, and Too Few Supers in place when the nectar flow begins to end. As a nectar flow starts to end (about May 31st in Montgomery County), remove some frames (about 10) that are empty or slightly filled with nectar, and move your fully capped frames to the outside positions of a super and the uncapped frames to the center of the super. This encourages capping of all super frames. More important however, if there is no room in the supers left for any more nectar storage, the bees will push the queen towards the bottom brood chamber, so they can store the ending nectar down in the brood chamber. THAT is GOOD, because you really don't need any more bees until next year, plus food in the brood chamber prevents the bees from starving in the nectar dearth of July and August. Further, with little or no nectar flow, the worker bees stop feeding the queen so she won't lay very much brood that uses up winter stores. Most new and novice beekeepers have never realized the importance of getting some stores into the brood chamber area for the dearth of late summer.

Lastly, many beekeepers lose much of their honey crop because they inspected their colonies TOO MUCH during the nectar flow! When you blow just a little bit of smoke in a colony to "see how they are doing", essentially you have stopped most of their work of foraging, evaporating nectar, ripening honey, and comb building for 12-24 hours as they blow away the smoke, repair comb that you damaged, reseal seams with propolis, and regurgitate honey that they had swallowed in preparation for finding a new home. If you had done the many jobs necessary ON TIME prior to the nectar flow, there is little need of inspection during the flow.